



SUNSHINE COAST BIG BUILD PROJECTS

The Direct Sunshine Coast Rail Line

Sunshine Motorway, Mooloolah River Interchange (MRI) Upgrade

Kawana Motorway planning

Sunshine Coast Public Transport project

August 2023

University of the Sunshine Coast submission

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Executive Summary

The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) is pleased to provide a consolidated submission in response to the Queensland Government's latest consultation on its four key Sunshine Coast transport projects:

- The Direct Sunshine Coast Rail Line
- Sunshine Motorway, Mooloolah River Interchange (MRI) Upgrade
- Kawana Motorway planning
- Sunshine Coast Public Transport project.

UniSC's submission is structured as follows:

1. UniSC overview
2. General feedback on all four transport projects
3. Direct Sunshine Coast Rail Line
4. Sunshine Motorway, Mooloolah River Interchange (MRI) Upgrade
5. Kawana Motorway planning
6. Sunshine Coast Public Transport project.

Recommendations for all four transport projects

1. *DTMR to make specific reference to our Sunshine Coast campus in any publications and community comments, in recognition of the significant trip and transport impacts we create on the local and wider transport networks, and proactively engage with UniSC on this and future major transport projects.*
2. *DTMR to incorporate the need to service the UniSC Sunshine Coast campus in relevant planning in recognition of the significant space and transport impacts we create on the local and wider transport networks and identify opportunities for better connectivity to and from our campuses in the planning and design phases for new / upgraded infrastructure and services.*
3. *DTMR to undertake a specific transport study in conjunction with UniSC to better evaluate and plan enhanced public and active transport connections and services to our campus, leading to the development of a joint transport strategy, supported by both organisations. UniSC is willing to take the lead role to facilitate this body of work.*
4. *DTMR / TransLink to undertake a joint review of bus timetabling to service the Sunshine Coast campus in partnership with UniSC. The review should consider UniSC class timetabling and the service connections to the Landsborough and Nambour train stations.*

Recommendations for the Direct Sunshine Coast Rail Line

5. *DTMR to incorporate a multi modal transit hub at the proposed Birtinya train station and include a dedicated high-speed public transport link to our Sunshine Coast campus (per Southern Sunshine Coast Public Transport Strategy (March 2023)).*
6. *DTMR to consider appropriate rail and other public transport links to identified Sunshine Coast Olympic and Paralympic venues in the planning and delivery of the Direct Rail Line.*
7. *The Queensland Government, in partnership with the Australian Government, commits to the delivery of the Direct Rail Line in time for the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games to create a once in a lifetime legacy project for the growing Sunshine Coast region.*

Recommendations for the Sunshine Motorway, Mooloolah River Interchange (MRI) Upgrade

8. *DTMR to include provision for a dedicated off-road cycleway connection as part of the MRI Upgrade design, linking to UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus.*
9. *DTMR to undertake a planning and design process to fully upgrade the existing Sunshine Motorway cycleway, to meet current standards, with the inclusion of safe intersection crossings, continuous development to the Coastal Path and upgraded wayfinding signage to increase utilisation of this important link.*

Recommendations for Kawana Motorway Planning

10. *DTMR to partner with UniSC to better understand and develop opportunities to mitigate environmental impacts of this transport corridor project.*
11. *DTMR to prioritise public and active transport treatments in the corridor with services connecting to UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus and the Kawana Health Precinct.*

Recommendations for Sunshine Coast Public Transport Project

12. *DTMR to include the servicing and connection of UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus in the Sunshine Coast Public Transport Project planning and implementation.*
13. *DTMR to consider alternative mass transit vehicles for future servicing (e.g. driverless EV / hydrogen vehicles) to allow scale up and early roll out of solutions. UniSC is willing to host and support joint investigations into the feasibility of such solutions.*
14. *DTMR to progress planning and delivery in time for the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics.*

1. Introduction

The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) is pleased to provide a consolidated submission in response to the Queensland Government's latest consultation on its four key Sunshine Coast transport projects:

- The Direct Sunshine Coast Rail Line
- Sunshine Motorway, Mooloolah River Interchange (MRI) Upgrade
- Kawana Motorway planning
- Sunshine Coast Public Transport project.

UniSC's comments on these four projects are focused on our Sunshine Coast Campus at Sippy Downs and other local facilities, however improved road and public transport connectivity within the larger eastern corridor from Brisbane to the Fraser Coast is an important enabler of the University's overall sustainability and growth.

UniSC notes the Queensland Government's previously published *Southern Sunshine Coast Public Transport Strategy* (March 2023) which provides an excellent plan for better connectivity across the Sunshine Coast region and identifies our campus at Sippy Downs as a significant attractor and trip generator.

UniSC would welcome the opportunity to elaborate on any aspect of our submission. If this is of interest, please contact Jason Mills, Head of Government Relations on jmills3@usc.edu.au or 0415 950 619.

2. UniSC overview

UniSC was founded by its community in 1996 after Sunshine Coast residents campaigned for locally provided tertiary education opportunities. As the first greenfield university to open in Australia since 1975, UniSC has helped unlock the innovation, productivity and potential of its regional communities through the contributions from its alumni and 17,500 current students studying a diverse offering of in-demand higher education programs.

Consistent with our mission to improve access to higher education in underserved locations, UniSC has strategically expanded its footprint into more regional communities, encompassing areas from Moreton Bay to the Fraser Coast. The University collaborates closely with all levels of government, regional leaders, industry, and other partners to ensure our programs, research and support services align to create greater opportunities in all the areas it operates within.

On the world stage, UniSC is recognised by The Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings as a global leader in climate action, clean water sanitation, life on land, and life below water. This ranking comes alongside the Australian Research Council's recognition of UniSC as a producer of world-class research in 26 speciality areas, including environmental science, medical and health sciences, neuroscience, technology, and psychology.

Among public universities, UniSC is number one in Queensland¹ and in the nation's top two, for overall educational experience. In the Good Universities Guide 2022/23, we have 13 five-star ratings from key areas of student satisfaction, for teaching quality, overall experience, learner resources, skills development, social equity, student support, first generation and learner engagement (postgraduate).

¹ [2021 Student Experience Survey Data](#)

2.1 UniSC campuses and facilities

UniSC operates five campuses from the Fraser Coast to the Moreton Bay region.

Sunshine Coast campus

The Sunshine Coast campus at Sippy Downs is home to over 12,000 students and over 1000 academic and professional staff.

The campus hosts the Sippy Downs transit centre, operated by TransLink under a lease arrangement, that serves the wider Sippy Downs and Chancellor Park communities, surrounding schools and businesses as well as UniSC students and staff.

The campus is connected to the Sunshine Coast region through a network of local and State-controlled roads, dedicated public transport services (with bus services to the wider Sunshine Coast region and Landsborough train station), and active transport cycleways connecting to Mooloolaba and the surrounding suburbs.

There are several private student accommodation providers on our southern boundary with capacity for up to 1,000 students. UniSC is also considering an on-campus student accommodation facility, at this stage with approximately 500 room capacity. Students who reside in local accommodation rely heavily on public transport systems and rarely own private vehicles.

UniSC's Sports Precinct includes a state-of-the-art stadium with indoor courts, Olympic-standard heated swimming pool, 25-metre heated swimming pool, two gyms (one for community, students and staff and a high-performance gym for elite student athletes and visiting elite / professional teams), international standard athletics track, outdoor courts and playing fields. The Precinct has played a major role in hosting domestic and international teams in the lead up to previous Commonwealth and Olympic games. The Precinct is also home to the Sunshine Coast's first professional sporting team – Sunshine Coast Lightning netball team – as well as the Australian Cycling Academy and is accessed by many organisations, local schools and community groups seven days a week for sporting, social and business events.

Moreton Bay campus

Opened in 2020, Australia's newest university campus at Petrie, 22km north of Brisbane, forms part of The Mill, a civic, cultural and business precinct planned by Moreton Bay City Council.

Ideally situated next to the Petrie train station, many of our students and staff travel regularly by road and public transport to our campuses at Caboolture and the Sunshine Coast.

Due to low higher education participation rates in the region, the campus has grown quickly and is currently supporting over 4,000 students and approximately 150 academic and professional staff.

Caboolture campus

The Caboolture campus is co-located with the Caboolture TAFE Queensland campus and is home to around 620 students.

Fraser Coast campus

The Fraser Coast campus is located in the central business district of Hervey Bay and currently supports around 575 students.

Gympie campus

The Gympie campus is co-located with the Gympie TAFE Queensland campus and is home to around 190 students.

Sunshine Coast Health Institute (SCHI)

The [Sunshine Coast Health Institute](#) (SCHI), located in the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, is a joint venture collaborative partnership between Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service, UniSC, TAFE Queensland and Griffith University. SCHI plays a vital role in training the next generation of staff, fostering innovation, and maintaining a culture of ongoing clinical audit, redesign, and clinical practice improvement to support excellence in the delivery of care.

The Thompson Institute

The [Thompson Institute](#) is a world-class hub for research, teaching and clinical services for Australia's most pressing mental health issues. UniSC, with government and philanthropic support, is currently building a National PTSD Centre as an extension to the existing Institute, which will be open in early 2024. The Institute is situated opposite the Kawana Private Hospital on the Sunshine Coast.

3. General feedback on all four transport projects

UniSC acknowledges the planning being undertaken across these four important projects to better connect our region. However, we note that the connection and servicing of our largest campus at Sippy Downs does not currently appear to be duly considered in the publicly available planning and consultation documents for these projects.

Given the significant number of students and staff based at UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus, most of whom rely heavily on the road and public transport networks operated by the Queensland Government, we would like to see greater consideration of the campus transport needs.

3.1 [UniSC Sunshine Coast Campus Master Plan - transport opportunities](#)

UniSC has recently updated its Sunshine Coast campus Master Plan following extensive consultation with our students, staff and stakeholders, including local schools, Sunshine Coast Council, elected officials and the Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR).

The updated Master Plan recognises the key partnership role that DTMR has with UniSC and identifies opportunities for greater collaboration in planning future transport solutions. For example, the campus is currently heavily car based, yet we host a bus transit centre that could be better utilised by staff and students. We also identified significant potential for high-quality, dedicated active transport links, to take advantage of the rise in e-bikes and micro mobility devices.

3.2 [Public transport services planning and review](#)

As noted in *Southern Sunshine Coast Public Transport Strategy* (March 2023), our Sunshine Coast campus is identified to be provided with high frequency bus services in the future. We believe a joint review of the current bus service frequency and timing should be undertaken now to align with our study timetabling and better meet student and staff needs, with a view to increasing public transport patronage.

3.3 [Recommendations](#)

1. *DTMR to make specific reference to our Sunshine Coast campus in any publications and community comments, in recognition of the significant trip and transport impacts we create on the local and wider transport networks, and proactively engage with UniSC on this and future major transport projects.*
2. *DTMR to incorporate the need to service the UniSC Sunshine Coast campus in relevant planning in recognition of the significant space and transport impacts we create on the local and wider transport networks and identify opportunities for better connectivity to and from our campuses in the planning and design phases for new / upgraded infrastructure and services.*

3. *DTMR to undertake a specific transport study in conjunction with UniSC to better evaluate and plan enhanced public and active transport connections and services to our campus, leading to the development of a joint transport strategy, supported by both organisations. UniSC is willing to take the lead role to facilitate this body of work.*
4. *DTMR / TransLink to undertake a joint review of bus timetabling to service the Sunshine Coast campus in partnership with UniSC. The review should consider UniSC class timetabling and the service connections to the Landsborough and Nambour train stations.*

4. Direct Sunshine Coast Rail Line

UniSC welcomes further planning for the long awaited and important rail line to Maroochydore. Given forecast population growth on the Sunshine Coast, along with expected growth in the education and training sector, we strongly support government investment in rail transport networks.

4.1 Planning for growth

The population of the Sunshine Coast region (covering the Sunshine Coast Council and Noosa Shire Council areas) is forecast to grow from 400,000 to over 560,000 people in the next 20 years. The lack of a high-quality rail connection servicing the main population areas of the region, including into the growing Maroochydore City Centre, will increase reliance on the road network for residents and visitors.

Due to a lack of appropriate local and intra-regional public transport links, UniSC staff and students rely heavily on road transport to access our Sunshine Coast campus and other facilities. A new rail line, with dedicated high speed public transport links to our campus, would alleviate the reliance on personal vehicle transport and hence the pressure on local roads and parking.

4.2 UniSC Sports Precinct

As noted earlier in this submission, UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus includes internationally accredited sports facilities, including pools, indoor basketball / netball courts, athletics track and gymnasiums.

Our facilities are used heavily already by our university community, the wider community and elite athletes. We also host events that can see over 4,000 people attend the site, with the majority of travel via private vehicle. UniSC will undoubtedly host many national and international sporting teams in the lead up to the 2032 Olympics and Paralympic Games.

The future train station at Birtinya would therefore be an ideal site for a multi modal transport hub, with a dedicated and high-speed public transport link to our Sunshine Coast campus.

4.3 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games

The early commitment of events and accommodation facilities in the Sunshine Coast region provides an excellent opportunity for the Queensland Government to partner with the Australian Government to create a true road and public transport legacy for the region. We note specifically the key event facilities and locations and how they could be served by the new rail line:

- Athletes Village, Maroochydore – Served by the proposed rail terminus in the Maroochydore City Centre.
- Mountain Biking, Nambour Parklands – Served by both the existing North Coast rail line (Nambour train station) and the proposed Maroochydore train station, via dedicated public transport services.
- Marathon / walking / road cycling, Alexandra Headlands – Served by the proposed Mountain Creek train station, with active transport and dedicated public transport services.

- Basketball / football, Kawana – Served by the proposed Birtinya train station, with pedestrian and active transport links across the soon to be built Lake Kawana footbridge.

Each of these event facilities are perfectly located to take advantage of a new rail line to transport locals, visitors and officials alike.

4.4 Timing

While the proposal for the rail line has a significant body of detail in the information provided, what is lacking is any specific reference to timing for delivery. We understand the significant capital expenditure that the full rail system will require; however, the timing is perfect to seek a joint State and Australian Government commitment to deliver this important project, to be in place in time for the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

4.5 Recommendations

5. DTMR to incorporate a multi modal transit hub at the proposed Birtinya train station and include a dedicated high speed public transport link to our Sunshine Coast campus (per Southern Sunshine Coast Public Transport Strategy (March 2023)).
6. DTMR to consider appropriate rail and other public transport links to identified Sunshine Coast Olympic and Paralympic venues in the planning and delivery of the Direct Rail Line.
7. The Queensland Government, in partnership with the Australian Government, commit to the delivery of the Direct Rail Line in time for the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games to create a once in a lifetime legacy project for the growing Sunshine Coast region.

5. Sunshine Motorway, Mooloolah River Interchange (MRI) Upgrade

UniSC supports the upgrade of the Mooloolah River Interchange (MRI) which provides vital transport links to connect our Sunshine Coast campus and other facilities.

The concept design appears to be a logical first stage solution to help alleviate the congestion and safety issues with the current configuration and it is pleasing to see dedicated off road active transport connections included.

5.1 Sunshine Motorway active transport cycleway upgrade

The MRI Upgrade concept design does not make it clear if consideration is being given to the much-needed upgrade of the dedicated off-road cycleway running parallel to the Sunshine Motorway (southern side) from the eastern boundary of UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus to Mooloolaba. This cycleway link is well used by our local community, students and staff; however, it has a number of dangerous crossing points where the cycleway ceases to exist, requiring on-road travel, through the Brightwater/ Mountain Creek area.

UniSC's updated Sunshine Coast campus Master Plan identifies the need for a fully upgraded dedicated cycleway to connect east to west and provide a safe and well signed active transport link from our campus through to the Coastal Path at Brisbane Road, Mooloolaba. We suggest that this link be incorporated into the MRI Upgrade design or progressed as a separate project.

5.2 Recommendations

8. DTMR to include provision for a dedicated off-road cycleway connection as part of the MRI Upgrade design, linking to UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus.
9. DTMR to undertake a planning and design process to fully upgrade the existing Sunshine Motorway cycleway, to meet current standards, with the inclusion of safe intersection crossings, continuous development to the Coastal Path and upgraded wayfinding signage to increase utilisation of this important link.

6. Kawana Motorway Planning

UniSC supports an upgraded north-eastern link to the Sunshine Motorway, however the impacts on the natural vegetation need careful consideration.

Currently the traffic backlog on Nicklin Way and Kawana Way in the mornings and particularly in the evenings, when staff and students are traveling home, has become increasingly bottle-necked, with associated increased travel times and safety issues.

6.1 Habitat impacts and mitigation research opportunity

UniSC notes that the corridor set aside for this future motorway has the potential to have a significant environmental impact upon the existing wallum wetland vegetation to the east.

UniSC experienced academic and research staff are able to provide advice and undertake joint research projects to determine how best to mitigate and minimise any environmental impact by this project.

6.2 Public and active transport priorities

UniSC encourages prioritisation of dedicated public and active transport solutions as a key component of the design treatments. This corridor has the capacity to host dedicated public transit vehicles in the future to reduce reliance on personal vehicles and provide incentives for people to commute along this corridor, including to UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus and the Kawana Health Precinct.

6.3 Recommendations

10. *DTMR to partner with UniSC to better understand and develop opportunities to mitigate environmental impacts of this transport corridor project.*
11. *DTMR to prioritise public and active transport treatments in the corridor with services connecting to UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus and the Kawana Health Precinct.*

7. Sunshine Coast Public Transport Project

UniSC supports the progression of this important study and calls for tangible projects to be identified and prioritised for delivery.

The Mass Transit Study and community consultation undertaken by Sunshine Coast Council effectively identified the need for a mass transit solution to be implemented to service the major community areas of Caloundra and Maroochydore, along the Kawana corridor, including the Sunshine Coast University Hospital and associated health precinct.

We are agnostic as to the form and type of solution but note that any successful mass / public transit system requires priority of movement along the corridor and through intersections, high-frequency and reliable services, and a high-quality customer experience.

7.1 Sunshine Coast campus connectivity

As has been highlighted throughout this submission, planning and design solutions should incorporate linkages and service connections to UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus. We suggest that a less rigidly defined system solution, such as a high-frequency trackless tram using existing road infrastructure, may be a better option than a fixed rail system.

We also note that the emergence of driverless electric or hydrogen-powered mass transit vehicles are in their infancy but may provide a more scalable future solution, with a low environmental / carbon footprint.

UniSC is interested in partnering with DTMR to trial such vehicles, noting our Sunshine Coast campus and research staff have capacity to host such a trial.

While the *Southern Sunshine Coast Public Transport Strategy* (March 2023) identifies the need to service UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus with high-frequency public transport services, the form of vehicle and timing of this service is not stated.

7.2 Olympic Games Legacy Timing

As per the previous sections, the 2032 Olympic and Paralympics will generate significant local and visitor traffic throughout the Sunshine Coast region, with escalated movements on the major transport corridor from Caloundra to Maroochydore. The provision of a high-quality mass transit system, in place to support the Games and beyond, would be another great legacy for the region.

7.3 Recommendations

12. *DTMR to include the servicing and connection of UniSC's Sunshine Coast campus in the Sunshine Coast Public Transport Project planning and implementation.*
13. *DTMR to consider alternative mass transit vehicles for future servicing (e.g. driverless EV / hydrogen vehicles) to allow scale up and early roll out of solutions. UniSC is willing to host and support joint investigations into the feasibility of such solutions.*
14. *DTMR to progress planning and delivery in time for the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics.*